

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A mail piece verification system for processing mail pieces, the mail pieces having associated therewith respective mail piece data, the system comprising:

~~a plurality of postage metering systems for preparing mail pieces;~~

~~a plurality of mail processing centers for receiving mail pieces and obtaining the respective mail piece data; and~~

~~a data center in operative communication with the plurality of postage metering systems and the~~ a plurality of mail processing centers, the data center including a plurality of account files corresponding to a the plurality of postage metering systems;

and wherein the data center is for:

storing reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively;

receiving respective mail piece data corresponding to the mail pieces from the plurality of mail processing centers;

using the respective mail piece data, storing empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; and

conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system.

2. (Original) The system of claim 1, wherein:

the data center uses a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis.

3. (Original) The system of claim 2, wherein:

the data center initiates responsive action if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

4. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein:

the responsive action includes conducting an inspection of the selected postage metering system.

5. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 3, wherein:

the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number;

the responsive action includes issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number; and

the data center provides instructions to the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number while allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number.

6. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 2, wherein:

the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number;

the responsive action includes issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number; and

the data center provides instructions to the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number while allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number.

7. (Original) The system of claim 3, wherein:

the responsive action includes issuing instructions to the plurality of mail processing centers to increase a sample rate for mail pieces including mail piece data corresponding to the selected postage metering system.

8. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a mail piece verification system for processing mail pieces, the mail pieces having associated therewith respective mail piece data, the method comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

receiving mail pieces at a plurality of mail processing centers that have been prepared by a plurality of postage metering systems;

obtaining the respective mail piece data from the mail pieces;

maintaining a plurality of account files corresponding to the plurality of postage metering systems;

storing reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively;

using the respective mail piece data, storing empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; and

conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system.

9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 8, further comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

using a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9, further comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

initiating responsive action if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

11. (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein:

the responsive action includes conducting an inspection of the selected postage metering system.

12. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, wherein the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number, ~~and further~~ the method further comprising ~~the step(s)~~ of:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number;

allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

instructing the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number.

13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 10, wherein the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number, ~~and further~~ the method further comprising ~~the step(s)~~ of:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number;

allowing normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

instructing the plurality of mail processing centers to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 11, further comprising ~~the step(s)~~ of:

increasing a sample rate at the plurality of mail processing centers for mail pieces including mail piece data corresponding to the selected postage metering system.

15. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a data center for processing data associated with mail pieces and a plurality of postage metering systems for preparing mail pieces, the method comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

~~receiving respective mail piece data associated with the mail pieces;~~

~~maintaining a plurality of account files corresponding to the plurality of postage metering systems;~~

~~obtaining~~ storing reset data in each of the plurality of account files representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, ~~respectively;~~

~~using the respective mail piece data, storing~~ obtaining empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, ~~respectively;~~ and

conducting a forensic accounting analysis of the empirical data and the reset data associated with a selected postage metering system.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15, further comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

using a previously defined time period over which to conduct the forensic accounting analysis.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 16, further comprising ~~the step(s) of:~~

initiating responsive action if the forensic accounting analysis reveals that the empirical data is not consistent with the reset data for the selected postage metering system.

18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 17, wherein:

the responsive action includes conducting an inspection of the selected postage metering system.

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 18, wherein the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number, ~~and further~~ the method further ~~comprising the step(s)~~ of:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number;

providing instructions to allow ~~allowing~~ normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

providing instructions ~~instructing the plurality of mail processing centers~~ to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number.

20. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 15, wherein the selected postage metering system includes an existing serial number, ~~and further~~ the method further ~~comprising the step(s)~~ of:

issuing a new serial number to the selected postage metering system to replace the existing serial number;

providing instructions to allow ~~allowing~~ normal processing of mail pieces containing the new serial number; and

providing instructions ~~instructing the plurality of mail processing centers~~ to withhold processing of mail pieces containing the existing ~~old~~ serial number.

21. (Original) A data structure comprising:

a plurality of account files corresponding to a plurality of postage metering systems, each of the plurality of account files including:

a serial number identifying a respective one of the plurality of postage metering systems;

reset data representative of reset activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively; and

empirical data in each of the plurality of account files representative of mailing activity associated with the plurality of postage metering systems, respectively.